

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894

ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

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The distribution of population, inhabited houses, and out-buildings in 1891, was as follows:—

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592

Islands.	Area.	POPULATION.			Houses.	Outbuildings and Farmsteadings.
		Persons.	Males.	Females.		
Inishbofin,	A. B. P. 2312 1 16	874	450	424	194	123
Inishshark,	581 1 30	123	61	62	28	14
54 other islands,	257 3 35	—	—	—	—	—
Totals, . .	3151 3 1	997	511	486	*222	137

It will be seen that the male population exceeds the female by 95, the cause evidently being the greater emigration of females than of males.

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The drain does not seem to have affected any one class of the males (as regards age) more than another, as the number of men between the ages of 20 and 60 is 203, or slightly more than one-fifth of the whole population.

Since the census was taken some slight change has occurred, for, according to a return obtained on the islands, there are now 186 families on Inishbofin, and 26 on Inishshark, being a loss of three families since 1891. A larger number of young people than usual is also said to have emigrated since then. Many of the older men state that emigration has taken away the finest men from the islands, especially Inishshark, and say that formerly the stature of the men was greater than it is now. I must say, however, that those of the elder generation still remaining are not as a rule better built or taller than their sons and grandsons.

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(B.) *Acreage and Rental.*—The total area is, as stated above, 3151 acres, the valuation of which, including houses, land, &c., is £572 6s. A very considerable proportion of the surface of the islands is commonage, the exact amount and distribution of which I am enabled

423
311
[435]

* Of these, 215 were inhabited.

423 to give by the kindness of the proprietor, Cyril Allies, Esq.,
 311 J. P. :—

Townland.	Area.	Commonage.
	A. R. P.	A. R. P.
Westquarter, ...	493 3 32	349 2 8
Fawnmore, ...	194 1 14	116 1 15
Middlequarter, ...	612 2 0	375 3 9
Knock, ...	366 1 9	161 3 39
Cloonamore, ...	645 1 1	424 3 29
Inishshark, ...	581 1 12	435 3 12
Ialeta, ...	257 3 35	—
Total, ...	3151 3 1	1864 1 32

● Taking the available area at 930 acres, and the number of families at 215, the average size of a holding per house is 4·3 acres, with a [435] corresponding average valuation of £2 13s. The size of a holding, [427] however, varies from 1A. 3R., at a rent of 14s. 6d., to 56 acres, at £7. Out of 127, the particulars of which were furnished me by Mr. Allies, there were :—

3 holdings of 1 acre and under 2 acres.			
21	2	3	3
17	3	4	4
8	4	5	5
23	5	6	6
15	6	7	7
12	7	8	8
17	8	10	10
5	10	13	13
4	13	18	18
1	holding of 25 acres		
1	56		

It will be observed that most of the holdings in this list are of very small size, only eleven being more than ten acres in extent, and 59 or 46·5 per cent. being under 5 acres.

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In 1891 there were only nine holdings, with a rating of over £4⁴²³ to £10, ninety-six with ratings between £2 and £4, and thirty-six at, 311
or under, £2. [435]

(c.) *Language and Illiteracy—Language.*—All the inhabitants (with the exception of a very few old people, most of whom live in Inishshark) now speak English, but their vocabulary does not seem to be very extensive. To a very large extent they speak Irish among themselves, but many of the children and young people have little or no acquaintance with the language. Irish is most spoken in Inishshark, which is less in communication with the outer world than Inishbofin. 191

It is much to be regretted that, as no return of the Irish-speaking districts by parishes is made by the census authorities, the proportion of those speaking Irish alone, and Irish and English, cannot be given here.

Illiteracy.—The population of the parish of Inishbofin of five years of age and upwards was, in 1891, 895, of whom 415, or 46·4 per cent. 212
were illiterate :— 162

	Persons.	Male.	Female.
Number above 5 years,	895	457	438
Illiterate, . . .	415	202	213
Percentage, . . .	46·4	44·2	48·6

Of the 480 who could read, 348 persons, 188 males, and 160 females could read and write, the remaining 132, 67 males, and 65 females, or more than a quarter of the whole, could read only. The rate of illiteracy is higher, as might be expected, among the females than the males, and probably is greater in Inishshark than Inishbofin.

(d.) *Longevity.*—Though the people do not seem to reach any very great age, yet they may be said to be fairly long-lived. According to the census of 1891 there were on the islands 27 persons, 10 males and 17 females of over 75 years of age, of whom there were— 145
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Aged 75 and under 80, 1 male and 3 females,
 „ 80 „ 85, 5 males and 14 females,
 „ 85 „ 90, 4 „ 0 „

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895

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Kilmore

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Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy.

161 The distribution of population, inhabited houses, and outbuildings was as follows in 1891:—

Locality.	Area.	POPULATION.			Houses.	Outbuildings and Farmsteadings.
		Persons.	Males.	Females.		
	A. R. P.					
The Mullet,	23,333 1 27	3757	1893	1864	600	532
N. Inishkea,	464 1 32	126	60	66	21	4
S. Inishkea,	344 3 19	180	92	88	32	33
23 Isleta,	350 0 17	48	22	26	10	27
Portacloy,	7845 1 1	299	148	151	54	29
Totals, . . .	32,338 0 6	410	2215	2195	717 ?	625

423 (B.) *Acreage and Rental.*—The total area of the district is that of
311 Kilmore, being 29,492 acres, and the three townlands forming the
Portacloy district, 7,845 acres.

● [435] The total valuation of Kilmore is £4,055 18s., and of Portacloy
£163 7s.

There is very little commonage in the Mullet, but about Portacloy there is a good deal.

[427] The holdings are not large, averaging about $4\frac{1}{2}$ or 5 acres at a rental of about £3 10s. in the Mullet, and about £2 10s. in "the mountains." There is considerable variation, however, as there are some farms of good size, but the majority are small.

In 1891 there were, in Kilmore, 210 holdings of between £4 and £10 valuation, 305 of £2 and under £4, and no less than 252 at, or under, £2 valuation.

175 The land is mostly held now at judicial rentals (the people having early taken advantage of the Land Act of 1881), but sixty years ago the greater part of the land was held in common, and the mode of tenure is thus described by Knight:—"In the whole of the peninsula there are few farms divided . . . the usual system being commonage both in tillage and pasture. In tillage, lots are cast every third year for the number of ridges each person is entitled to after the usual rotation is over. Potatoes the first year, then barley or oats, after which new lots must be cast for new potato ground. The holdings are by sums or collops, which originally meant the number

241 The manures used are mainly sea-weed and farmyard manure. In the mountains the practice of burning the land is common.

The pasture is fairly good, but the cattle and sheep are inferior, though efforts are now being made to improve the breeds.

An average family has a couple of pigs, a cow or two and some sheep, a large number of fowl, geese and ducks, and a donkey or horse.

372 The fuel used is turf obtained from the bogs, which are extensive, except in the southern part of the Mullet; and the islands which have now no turf of their own import from Achill or Ballycroy.

381 A very considerable quantity of kelp is made, on which, in the Mullet, a royalty is charged by the landlord. About Portacloy there is no royalty paid.

226 Fishing employs many of the men, though until lately the fish taken was merely for home use. The kinds usually caught are turbot, mackerel, ling, cod, and herrings; all of these, except the turbot, are now cured at the fishing stations established at several parts of the coast by the government. For home consumption, much is eaten fresh, but a good deal of it is roughly salted for winter use.

Lobsters are mostly taken by the men of Inishkea, and by a couple of boats at Portacloy. The Inishkea men, while at this fishing, mostly live in very primitive huts on Inisglora, where they stay away from their families for six weeks or two months at a time. [342] The lobsters are sold in Belmullet for about five shillings per dozen, and are sent by car to Ballina and thence to England. The lobster pots are mostly of home manufacture.

The fishery stations mentioned above now afford employment to many who formerly had no means of disposing of their surplus time and fish.

439 Large quantities of eggs are exported from this district, Belmullet being the largest egg exporting centre in Ireland. They are brought into the town by the country people and sold to dealers, who, when they have collected a sufficient quantity, send them on to Ballina, whence they are sent to England. Butter is also exported in the summer and autumn.

[234] Illicit distilling is carried on to some extent in this district, though not at all so prevalent as formerly. The stills are made in the people's homes by travelling tinkers who live with the family until the job is finished.

286 A good deal of homespun is made, but the dyes are not obtained

WRACK AND WRECK

222 minutely fragmented appearance of land held in rundale. Rights
387 of access, by narrow lanes between the beds, were often dis-
423 puted, and there were occasions for fights when as many as a
[578] hundred carts from forty townlands might converge on Mill Bay
at low tide. I first heard of the seaweed beds from an Air Force
pilot who brought me air photographs of what he thought was
submerged farmland: the little rectangular fields of Mourne
seemed to march out beneath the sea.¹ In fact they were neces-
sary adjuncts to the arable land, and the rents of up to twenty
pounds an acre were often higher than those paid for the fields
of coarse sand and gravel which the wrack enriched. An auc-
tioneer told me he had sold a wrackbed of one Irish acre for
● [435] £145 not many years ago. Nearly all of the several hundred
farmers who had wrack rights here held two or three beds,
and each man's plans were scattered so that he had different
kinds of weed growing on them: 'knob wrack' close inshore,
then 'bladder wrack' and farther out still the 'lazy wrack' whose
fronds are submerged at high water even at neaps and which
therefore grows faster than the other species.

222 The crop was harvested with knives and sickles between
March and June, the bare-footed reapers at the same time
lifting, turning and re-setting the heavy boulders which tend
to get buried in the sand. Carts too are liable to sink, and when
the going is too soft the weed is rafted ashore. It is allowed to
float on the incoming tide and a boat dragging a rope pulls the
[501] load together and tows it ashore. Very large rafts, secured by a
rope of seaweed, used to be floated ashore on the tide in Mayo.
Patrick Knight, describing Ballycroy about 1890, observed that
the steersman, armed with a pole, might be seen 'sitting on
the heap, roasting his potatoes and shellfish'.²

222 The great bulk of the wrack taken all round the coast for
423 manure was driftweed thrown up during storms, but the supply
was often supplemented by cutting or pulling weed from the
rocks, and in some places there were complicated methods of
regulating and distributing the harvest. On a stretch of coast
familiar to me in south Down one can pick out strips running
out into the sea, demarcated by marked boulders. They were

¹E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, ch. 15.

²P. Knight, *Erris in the Irish Highlands*, 99.

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[482]



Figure 5. Improving a garden with compost unloaded on seaweed

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the agent are providing seed potatoes and overseeing the construction of fences, fields, reservoirs, and outbuildings subsidized by the government.

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The average sized farm of a fourth has approximately half of its acreage in quarter- and half-acre gardens; the other half is divided fairly evenly between larger plots containing indigenous soils used for grazing and those enclosing limestone pavement, or "craggs." Gardens are smaller in size because subsidies for their manufacture are paid according to the quarter-acre—7 pounds and 10 shillings when a potato crop is grown—and a field this size can be converted into a garden comfortably in the period of a year. Most landholders plant from a half-acre to a full acre of potatoes yearly, and it is estimated that a quarter-acre will produce,

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[436]

under normal weather conditions, nearly four tons of "spuds." According to the agricultural agent, the use of human manure as a fertilizer accounts for such a high yield. The amount of potatoes consumed depends, of course, on the size of the householder's family, but many farmers export surpluses the following summer before new spuds are harvested.

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"Improving" refers both to developing a new garden and to enriching an old one with compost (see Fig. 5). New plots usually are manufactured in areas containing indigenous soils, so as to lessen the labor required. If a garden is to be "laid" on pavement, a much fissured area is chosen so that adequate drainage is afforded. The plot is leveled by removing protruding stones with crowbar and sledge hammer (not by throwing a huge boulder from above the head, as shown in the aforementioned film), and fissures are filled with small rocks to the extent that soil components added later will not filter down. Large stones are placed in fences which surround the field, for which the government pays the farmer, or farmers, involved in their construction 2 pounds for each 22 yards raised 4 feet.

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Writers describing the local milieu seldom fail to mention that fences are numer-

36 • THE LAND AND THE SEA

kelp-making has disappeared, pig rearing has been abandoned, and fishing has become mainly a subsistence pursuit engaged in by only a small number of islanders. Hand in glove with these developments came the enlargement of arable lands and hence an increase in good pasturage, first necessitated by the intrusion of the eelworm and then stimulated by government agricultural supports. Farming became a more time consuming and lucrative occupation, as did the breeding and fattening of cattle and sheep for export, and the keeping of horses and asses expanded to accommodate the increased emphasis on farming. Thus, while the subsistence economy changed but slightly in two generations, the money economy experienced a radical alteration.

At the present time, 59 householders own one or more cattle; 56, one or more sheep; 22, one or more horses; and 58, one or more asses, among whom 8 have 2 asses and 1 a jennet. The government regulates the breeding of both cattle and horses, with the result that only one man is licensed to own a bull and the horses are mares or geldings. Cows are serviced for a 1 pound stud fee in the most inaccessible of fields, where children and tourists cannot observe the breeding of the "beasts." Most of the asses, just as the bulls and stallions, are castrated, but in this case to prevent them from kicking down fences and braying excessively when sexually aroused. Whereas almost all of the horses and asses and a few cattle have been imported from the mainland, the sheep population is Inis Beag sired. For the most part, cattle are grazed on fallowing plots, the few goats on crags at the back of the island, and other livestock on indigenous pasturage.

Cattle owners usually possess a "milch cow," a yearling, and a calf, and cows and bullocks are sold at two years of age. When a milch cow becomes old and "dried up," it either is fattened and sold or, if the price on the mainland is low, butchered and eaten by the householder and his family, usually between Allhallows and Christmas. "Cattle jobbers" visit the island to purchase cows and bullocks, and in 1960 they were paying between 60 and 80 pounds per beast. Excitement prevails on the strand on days when cattle are shipped off. Each struggling animal is pushed out into the sea by a group of men and then pulled to a canoe by a rope attached around its neck; its head is held over the stern transom of the *curach* for the trip to the steamer, where it is hoisted from the water and swung high over the deck and into a hold. Sometimes an islander is forced by circumstances to import a calf, and in 1960 the purchase price of calves at the fair in a nearby port was approximately 20 pounds; a colt cost about 50 pounds and an ass 5.

Probably the most striking difference between cattle rearing on the mainland and in Inis Beag is that island cows are not stabled, but forage and are milked throughout the year in the fields. Between November and March, they are pastured south of the terrace crest on fallowing and the more luxuriant of the indigenous plots, fed hay and rye carried to them from barns and outbuildings, and watered by bucket from neighboring springs which are swollen from winter rains. Men and boys care for their needs during this period, and often spend as many as three hours walking out and back to the pastures twice each day. With the coming of spring, cows are moved to fields on the terraces where women and children can feed and milk them, or men, who are now entering on the busy agricultural and